THE UNSEX'D FEMALES

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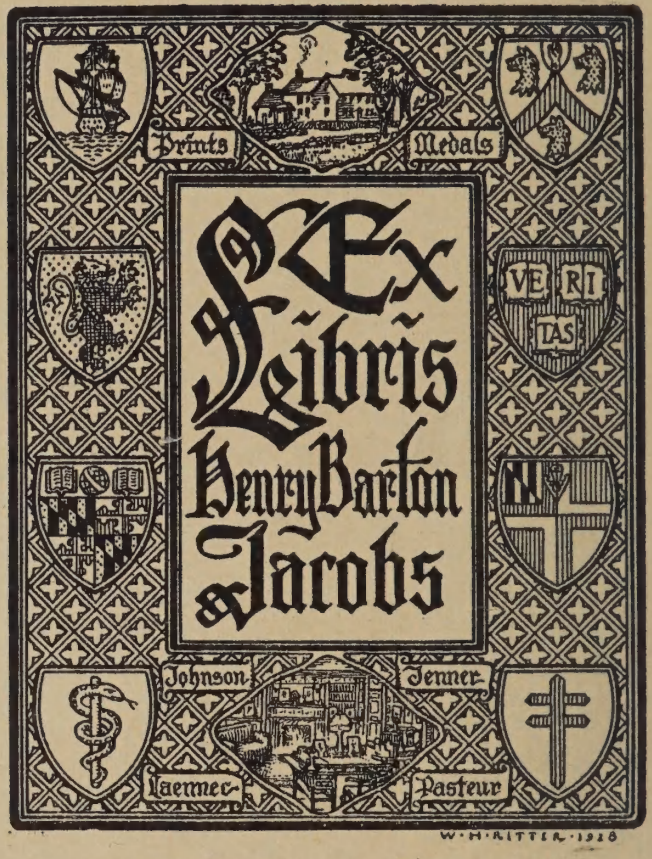

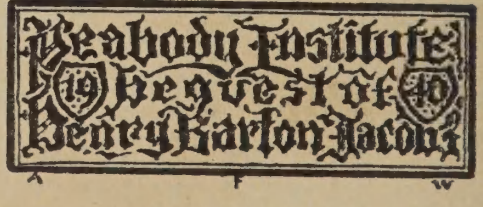

THE

UNSEX'D FEMALES:

A

POEM,

ADDRESSED TO THE AUTHOR OF

THE PURSUITS OF LITERATURE.

[R. Polwhele] ✓

" Our unsex'd female writers now instruct, or confuse, us and themselves, in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy."———Pursuits of Literature, Edit. 7. p. 238.

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THE

UNSEX'D FEMALES.

THOU, who with all the poet's* genuine rage,
Thy "fine eye rolling" o'er "this aweful age,"
Where polish'd life unfolds its various views,
Hast mark'd the magic influence of the muse; †

* In my opinion, the Author of "the Pursuits of Literature" has discovered, in his animated Satire, a true poetical genius. And (as a writer, who had very little pretensions to that character himself, observes) "a true poet is a public good." The satire in question, seems to have produced effects, resembling those which distinguished the poetry of Greece and Rome. For I can assert, on the best authorities, that many in this country, whose politics and even religion have been long wavering, are now fixed in their principles by "the Pursuits of Literature."

† By the muse, I mean literature in general.

Sever'd, with nice precision, from her beam *
Of genial power, her false or feeble gleam;

* I agree with the Author of "the Pursuits," both in his praises and his censures of the writers of this country, with a few exceptions only. To his eulogia, indeed, I heartily assent: but, I think, his animadversions on Darwin and Hayley in particular, are unmerited. In composing his Botanic Garden, Dr. Darwin was aware, that though imagination refuse to enlist under the banner of science, yet science may sometimes be brought forward, not unhappily, under the conduct of imagination: and of the latter, if I am any way a judge, we are presented with a complete specimen in that admirable poem. With respect to the structure of the poem, we have been told, that it wants connexion—that there is a reciprocal repulsion between the scientific and imaginative particles, and so little affinity even between the latter, that they cannot possibly cohere. But on this topic, let us hear the Author himself; who invites us to contemplate, in his poem, "a "great variety of little pictures, connected only by a slight festoon of "ribbons." And they are pictures glowing in the richest colors---the most beautiful, in short, that were ever delineated by the poetic pencil. I defy any one of Dr. Darwin's censurers, to point out a single picture, which is not finished with touches the most exquisite —"with all the magic charms of light and shade." I had intended to examine the style, the versification, the poetry; but rather let me desire my Reader to open either of the volumes, at a venture, and take the first description that presents itself: and he will find painting sublime as Fuseli's, or beautiful as Emma Crewe's. It is easy to run over the changes of "artificial glitter"—"glaring varnish"—"deliciousness that

Expos'd the Sciolist's vain-glorious claim,

And boldly thwarted Innovation's aim,

" cloys." Thus was Gibbon treated. Gibbon, forsooth, was required to bring down the haughtiness of his style to a level with that of vulgar " prosers." And Darwin must lower his eagle wing, to silence the clamour of the poetic sparrow-hawks, that, whilst they arraign his flights, are pining at their own imbecillity.———Of the other poet, Mr. Hayley, whose merit has been much depreciated by the Author of " the Pursuits," I have always entertained the highest opinion. In graceful negligence, and in harmony of numbers, he surely stands unrivalled. He has all that lucid imagery, and that chaste elegance which characterise the poet of Eloisa: and his imagery is his own. Pope's was borrowed. In copiousness of expression, he is vastly superior to Pope. But from his command of language, he is sometimes tempted to riot in redundancies, or to expand a sentiment where he ought to compress it. I need not enumerate his various productions, both in verse and prose; all of which will probably descend to posterity, with honor to his name. But his " Triumphs of Temper" is a poem, in which the invention of Spenser is blended with the perspicuity and melody of Pope.---I might mention other names which the Author of " the Pursuits" seems to have slighted—but I shall hint only, that he has entirely omitted several names of literary respectability---particularly in the west of England. What does he think of Whitaker? Doubtless, a gentleman of such high eminence as the historian of Manchester, the memorialist of Mary Queen of Scots, &c. &c. must have his share " in affecting public order, " regulated government and polished society."

Where witlings wildly think, or madly dare,*
With Honor, Virtue, Truth, announcing war;
Survey with me, what ne'er our fathers saw,
A female band despising NATURE's law,†
As "proud defiance‡" flashes from their arms,
And vengeance smothers all their softer charms.

* "Greatly think, or nobly die." Pope.

† Nature is the grand basis of all laws human and divine: and the woman, who has no regard to nature, either in the decoration of her person, or the culture of her mind, will soon "walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government."

‡ "A troop came next, who crowns and armour wore,
"And proud defiance in their looks they bore." Pope.

The Amazonian band---the female Quixotes of the new philosophy, are, here, too justly characterised. Nor could they read, I suspect, some passages in the sixth satire of Juvenal without an uneasy sensation:

Quam præstare potest mulier galeata pudorem?

I have seen in MS. Mr. Gifford's masterly translation of this satire. Our expectations, I hope, will soon be gratified by his entire version of Juvenal.

I shudder at the new unpictur'd scene,
Where unsex'd woman vaunts the imperious mien;
Where girls, affecting to dismiss the heart,
Invoke the Proteus of petrific art;
With equal ease, in body or in mind,
To Gallic freaks or Gallic faith resign'd,
The crane-like neck, as Fashion bids, lay bare,
Or frizzle, bold in front, their borrow'd hair;
Scarce by a gossamery film carest,
Sport,* in full view, the meretricious breast; †
Loose the chaste cincture, where the graces shone,
And languish'd all the Loves, the ambrosial zone;

* To "sport a face," is a cant phrase in one of our Universities, by which is meant an impudent obtrusion of a man's person in company. It is not inapplicable, perhaps, to the open bosom---a fashion which we have never invited or sanctioned.

† The fashions of France, which have been always imitated by the English, were, heretofore, unexceptionable in a moral point of view; since, however ridiculous or absurd, they were innocent. But they have now their source among prostitutes—among women of the most

As lordly domes inspire dramatic rage,
Court prurient Fancy to the private stage;
With bliss botanic * as their bosoms heave,
Still pluck forbidden fruit, with mother Eve,
For puberty in sighing florets pant,
Or point the prostitution of a plant;

abandoned character. "See Madam Tallien come into the theatre, "and other beautiful women, laying aside all modesty, and present- "ing themselves to the public view, with bared limbs, a la sauvage, "as the alluring objects of desire."

Robison's Proofs of a Conspiracy, &c. &c. Edit. 2. p. 252.

* Botany has lately become a fashionable amusement with the ladies. But how the study of the sexual sytem of plants can accord with female modesty, I am not able to comprehend. See note from Darwin's Botanic Garden, at p.

I had, at first, written:

More eager for illicit knowlege pant,
With lustful boys anatomize a plant;
The virtues of its dust prolific speak,
Or point its pistill with unblushing cheek.

I have, several times, seen boys and girls botanizing together.

Dissect * its organ of unhallow'd lust,
And fondly gaze the titillating † dust; ‡
With liberty's sublimer views expand, §
And o'er the wreck of kingdoms || sternly stand;

* Miss Wollstonecraft does not blush to say, in an introduction to a book designed for the use of young ladies, that, "in order to lay the axe "at the root of corruption, it would be proper to familiarize the sexes to "an unreserved discussion of those topics, which are generally avoided "in conversation from a principle of false delicacy; and that it would "be right to speak of the organs of generation as freely as we mention "our eyes or our hands." To such language our botanizing girls are doubtless familiarized: and, they are in a fair way of becoming worthy disciples of Miss W. If they do not take heed to their ways, they will soon exchange the blush of modesty for the bronze of impudence.

† "Each pungent grain of titillating dust." Pope.

‡ "The prolific dust"—of the botanist.

§ Non vultus, non color unus,
Non comptæ mansere comæ: sed pectus anhelum,
Et rabie fera corda tument; majorque videri, &c.

Except the non color unus, Virgil's Sibyll seems to be an exact portrait of a female fashionist, both in dress and philosophism.

|| The female advocates of Democracy in this country, though they have had no opportunity of imitating the French ladies, in their atro-

And, frantic, midst the democratic storm,
Pursue, Philosophy! thy phantom-form *.
Far other is the female shape and mind,
By modest luxury heighten'd and refin'd;

cious acts of cruelty; have yet assumed a stern serenity in the contemplation of those savage excesses. "To express their abhorrence "of royalty, they (the French ladies) threw away the character of "their sex, and bit the amputated limbs of their murdered countrymen. "—I say this on the authority of a young gentleman who saw it.--- "I am sorry to add, that the relation, accompanied with looks of "horror and disgust, only provoked a contemptuous smile from an "illuminated British fair-one." See Robison---p. 251.

* Philosophism, the false image of philosophy. See the pseudo Eneas of the Eneid, 10. b. imitated from the Iliad, 15. b.

. . . .Nube cava tenuem sine viribus umbram. . . .
. . . . . .Dat inania verba,
Dat sine mente sonum. . . .

A true description of Philosophism; a phantom which heretofore appeared not in open day, though it now attempts the loftiest flights in the face of the sun. I trust, however, to English eyes, it is almost lost in the "black cloud" to which it owed its birth.

———Lævis haud ultra latebras jam quærit imago,
Sed, sublime volans, nubi se immiscuit atræ.

Those limbs, that figure, tho' by Fashion * grac'd,
By Beauty polish'd, and adorn'd by Taste;
That soul, whose harmony perennial flows,
In Music trembles, and in Color glows;
Which bids sweet Poesy reclaim the praise
With faery light to gild fastidious days,
From sullen clouds relieve domestic care,
And melt in smiles the withering frown of war.
Ah! once the female Muse, to NATURE true,
The unvalued store from FANCY, FEELING drew;
Won, from the grasp of woe, the roseate hours,
Cheer'd life's dim vale, and strew'd the grave with flowers.

* I admit that we are quickly reconciled to the fashion of the day, and often consider it as graceful, if it offend not against delicacy.

But lo ! where, pale amidst the wild,* she draws
Each precept cold from sceptic Reason's† vase;
Pours with rash arm the turbid stream along,
And in the foaming torrent whelms the throng.‡

Alas ! her pride sophistic flings a gloom,
To chase, sweet Innocence ! thy vernal bloom,
Of each light joy to damp the genial glow,
And with new terrors clothe the groupe of woe,

* " A wild, where flowers and weeds promiscuous shoot;
A garden tempting with forbidden fruit." Pope.

† A troubled stream only, can proceed from the vase of scepticism; if it be not " the broken cistern that will hold no water."—

‡ " Raging waves, foaming out their own shame"—St. Jude. Such were those infamous publications of Paine and others, which, like the torrents of December, threatened to sweep all before them—to overwhelm the multitude.

Quench the pure daystar* in oblivion deep,
And, Death! restore thy "long, unbroken sleep."†

See Wollstonecraft, whom no decorum checks,
Arise, the intrepid champion of her sex;
O'er humbled man assert the sovereign claim,
And slight the timid blush‡ of virgin fame.

"Go, go (she cries) ye tribes of melting maids,
"Go, screen your softness in sequester'd shades;
"With plaintive whispers woo the unconscious grove,
"And feebly perish, as depis'd ye love.

* Alluding to that beautiful passage: "Ere the day dawn, or the daystar arise in your hearts."

† . . . . . "We, the great, the valiant and the wise,
"When once the seal of death hath clos'd our eyes,
"Shut in the hollow tomb obscure and deep,
"Slumber, to wake no more, one long unbroken sleep."
Moschus.

‡ That Miss Wollstonecraft was a sworn enemy to blushes, I need not remark. But many of my readers, perhaps, will be astonished to hear, that at several of our boarding-schools for young ladies, a blush incurs a penalty.

"What tho' the fine Romances of Rousseau
"Bid the frame flutter, and the bosom glow;
"Tho' the rapt Bard, your empire fond to own,
"Fall prostrate and adore your living throne,
"The living throne his hands presum'd to rear,
"Its seat a simper, and its base a tear; *
"Soon shall the sex disdain the illusive sway,
"And wield the sceptre in yon blaze of day; †
"Ere long, each little artifice discard,
"No more by weakness ‡ winning fond regard;

* According to Rousseau, the empire of women is the empire of softness---of address: their commands, are caresses; their menaces, are tears.

† Her visual nerve was purged with euphrasy: she could see the illumination fast approaching, unperceived as it was by common mortals.

‡ "Like monarchs, we have been flattered into imbecillity, by "those who wish to take advantage of our weakness;" says Mary Hays (Essays and Letters, p. 92.) But, whether flattered or not, women were always weak: and female weakness hath accomplished, what the force of arms could not effect. "Mulieres urbem quam

"Nor eyes, that sparkle from their blushes, roll,
"Nor catch the languors of the sick'ning soul,
"Nor the quick flutter, nor the coy reserve,
"But nobly boast the firm gymnastic nerve;*
"Nor more affect with Delicacy's fan
"To hide the emotion from congenial man;
"To the bold heights where glory beams, aspire,
"Blend mental energy with Passion's fire,
"Surpass their rivals in the powers of mind
"And vindicate *the Rights of womankind.*"
She spoke: and veteran BARBAULD† caught
the strain,
And deem'd her songs of Love, her Lyrics vain;

"armis viri defendere non possent, precibus lacrymisque defende-
"runt---" Liv.

* Miss Wollstonecraft seriously laments the neglect of all muscular exercises, at our female Boarding-schools.

† Here, and at the conclusion of the Poem, I have formed a groupe of female Writers; whose productions have been appreciated by the

And ROBINSON * to Gaul her Fancy gave,
And trac'd the picture of a Deist's grave!

public as works of learning or genius---though not praised with that extravagance of panegyric, which was once a customary tribute to the literary compositions of women. In this country, a female author was formerly esteemed a Phenomenon in Literature: and she was sure of a favourable reception among the critics, in consideration of her sex. This species of gallantry, however, conveyed no compliment to her understanding. It implied such an inferiority of woman in the scale of intellect as was justly humiliating: and critical forbearance was mortifying to female vanity. At the present day, indeed, our literary women are so numerous, that their judges, waving all complimentary civilities, decide upon their merits with the same rigid impartiality as it seems right to exercise towards the men. The tribunal of criticism is no longer charmed into complacence by the blushes of modest apprehension. It no longer imagines the pleading eye of feminine diffidence that speaks a consciousness of comparative imbecillity, or a fearfulness of having offended by intrusion. Experience hath drawn aside the flimsy veil of affected timidity, that only served to hide the smile of complacency; the glow of self-gratulation. Yet, alas! the crimsoning blush of modesty, will be always more attractive, than the sparkle of confident intelligence.———Mrs. Barbauld stands the most conspicuous figure in the groupe. She is a veteran in Literature. I shall notice her poetry, in comparison with Mrs. Carter's: it is, certainly, chaste and elegant. Si sic, omnia dixisset! I was sorry to find Mrs. B. (among the gods, Miss Aikin!) classed with such females as a Wollstonecraft or a Jebb. "The most sensible women (says Mr. Dyer) are

And charming SMITH † resign'd her power to please,
Poetic feeling and poetic ease;

" more uniformly on the side of Liberty, than the other sex—wit-
" ness a Macaulay, a Wollstonecraft, a Barbauld, a Jebb, a Williams,
" a Smith." See Dyer's Poems, pp. 36, 37. But though Mrs. B. has lately published several political tracts which, if not discreditable to her talents and virtues, can by no means add to her reputation, yet, I am sure, she must reprobate, with me, the alarming eccentricities of Miss Wollstonecraft. Of Mrs. Jebb's Publications, I received the first intelligence in the notes to Mr. Dyer's Poems, (p. 36): and I have named her here, only as an obscure writer, when compared with Miss Aikin, the favourite of my earlier years, when first " I lisp'd in
" numbers."

* In Mrs. Robinson's Poetry, there is a peculiar delicacy: but her Novels, as literary compositions, have no great claim to approbation—As containing the doctrines of Philosophism, they merit the severest censure. Would that, for the sake of herself and her beautiful daughter (whose personal charms are only equalled by the elegance of her mind) would, that, for the sake of the public morality, Mrs. Robinson were persuaded to dismiss the gloomy phantom of annihilation; to think seriously of a future retribution; and to communicate to the world, a recantation of errors that originated in levity, and have been nursed by pleasure! I have seen her, " glittering like the morning-star, full of life,

And HELEN, * fir'd by Freedom, bade adieu
To all the broken visions of Peru;

" and splendor and joy!" Such, and more glorious, may I meet her again, when the just " shall shine forth as the brightness of the firmanent, " and as the stars for ever and ever!"

† The Sonnets of Charlotte Smith, have a pensiveness peculiarly their own: It is not the monotonous plaintiveness of Shenstone, the gloomy melancholy of Gray, or the meek subdued spirit of Collins. It is a strain of wild, yet softened sorrow, that breathes a romantic air, without losing, for a moment, its mellowness. Her images, often original, are drawn from nature: the most familiar, have a new and charming aspect. Sweetly picturesque, she creates with the pencil of a Gilpin, and infuses her own soul into the landscape. There is so uncommon a variety in her expression, that I could read a thousand of such Sonnets without lassitude. In general, a very few Sonnets fatigue attention, partly owing to the sameness of their construction. Petrarch, indeed, I can relish for a considerable time: but Spenser and Milton soon produce somnolence. As a Novel-writer, her Ethelinde and Emmeline place her above all her contemporaries, except Mrs. D'Arblay and Mrs. Radcliffe. But why does she suffer her mind to be infected with the Gallic mania? I hope, ere this, she is completely recovered from a disorder, of which, indeed, I observed only a few slight symptoms.

And YEARSELEY,† who had warbled, Nature's child,
Midst twilight dews, her minstrel ditties wild,

* Miss Helen Williams is, doubtless, a true poet. But is it not extraordinary, that such a genius, a female and so young, should have become a politician—that the fair Helen, whose notes of love have charmed the moonlight vallies, should stand forward, an intemperate advocate for Gallic licentiousness—that such a woman should import with her, a blast more pestilential than that of Avernus, though she has so often delighted us with melodies, soft as the sighs of the Zephyr, delicious as the airs of Paradise?—(See her "Letters from France.")

† Mrs. Yearseley's Poems, as the product of an untutored milk-woman, certainly entitled her to patronage: and patronage she received, from Miss H. More, liberal beyond example. Yet, such is the depravity of the human heart, that this milk-woman had so sooner her hut cheered by the warmth of benevolence, than she spurned her benefactor from her door. Perhaps, she had read, when a poor labourer's child at a charity-school, the Fable of "the Adder and Traveller;" the moral application of which to herself, at this crisis of her life, might have done her more essential service, than all her poetical reveries. But she has since pursued her literary career, with an ardor by no means damped by the sense of ingratitude. Self-love, indeed, seems to have thrown over her conduct a delusive colouring. In the Preface to her romantic Novel, "the Royal Captives," Mrs. Y. has plainly an eye to her

(Tho' soon a wanderer from her meads and milk,
She long'd to rustle, like her sex, in silk)
Now stole the modish grin, the sapient sneer,
And flippant HAYS * assum'd a cynic leer;
While classic KAUFFMAN † her Priapus drew,
And linger'd a sweet blush with EMMA CREWE.‡

Yet, say, ye Fair, with man's tyrannic host,
Say, where the battles ye so proudly boast,

worthy patroness. "Nature herself drew delusion in the desart, "where I was beloved by Fancy before I was alive to Fame, and tasted "more delight than I have since found in the midst of proud society, "where favor falls heavily on the heart from the hand of arrogance." My business, however, with Mrs. Y. is to recall her, if possible, from her Gallic wanderings—if an appeal to native ingenuousness be not too late; if the fatal example of the Arch-priestess of female Libertinism, have any influence on a mind once stored with the finest moral sentiment.

* Mary Hays, I believe, is little known: but from her "Letters and "Essays," she is evidently a Wollstonecraftian. "I cannot mentior

While, urg'd to triumph by the Spartan fife, §
Corporeal struggles mix'd with mental strife?

" (says she) the admirable advocate for the rights of women, without " pausing to pay a tribute of grateful respect, in the name of my sex, " to the virtue and talents of a writer, who with equal courage and " ability, hath endeavoured to rescue the female mind from those pre- " judices which have been the canker of genuine virtue." Preface to her " Letters and Essays," p. 6. " The rights of woman and the name of Wollstonecraft, will go down to posterity with reverence." " Letters," &c. p. 21. Mary Hays ridicules " the good lady who studied her " Bible, and obliged her children to say their prayers, and go statedly to " church." p. 34. Her expressions respecting the European Governments are, in a high degree, inflammatory. See pages 14, 15, 17, 18, 19.

† Angelica Kauffman's print, should accompany Miss Wollstonecraft's Instructions in Priapism, already noticed, by way of illustration. This, and a little plant-adultery, would go great lengths, in producing among girls, the consummation so devoutly wished.

‡ There is a charming delicacy in most of the pictures of Miss Emma Crewe; though I think, in her "Flora at play with Cupid," (the frontispiece to the Second Part of the Botanic Garden) she has rather overstepped the modesty of nature, by giving the portrait an air of voluptuousness too luxuriously melting.

§ Our new philosophical system (particularly that part of it which confounds the distinction of the sexes) bears a strong resemblance to the

Where, the plum'd chieftain of your chosen train,
To fabricate your laws, and fix your reign?

boasted institutions of Lycurgus. In Sparta, young women went abroad without veils; and married women could have entertained no very exalted idea of the matrimonial connexion, since they were often lent or let out by their husbands, to unmarried men, for the good of the community. As to the gymnastic exercises, alluded to above, it is well known, that Lycurgus obliged the young women to run, wrestle, throw quoits, &c. &c. and to appear naked, as well as the men, and dance naked at their solemn feasts and sacrifices, singing appropriate songs; whilst the young men made a ring round them, spectators of the exhibition. Though, at first, true modesty (it seems) was observed; yet the women, in process of time, converted those solemnities into instruments of libertinism; insomuch, that they were censured by ancient writers for their excessive wantonness. See Plutarch, in his Lives of Lycurgus and Numa. The Spartan women were considered by Lycurgus, as mere state-breeders: and such are they considered by the French, at the present hour. It was declared by a Decree of the Convention (June 6th, 1794) that there was nothing criminal in the promiscuous commerce of the sexes. But that abominable farce in the Church of Notre Dame (which is in every one's recollection) was an exhibition truly Spartan. "We do not (said the High Priest to the populace) call you to the wor-"ship of inanimate idols. Behold a masterpiece of nature" (lifting up the veil which concealed the naked charms of the beautiful Madms. Barbier) "This sacred image shall influence all hearts." And it did

Say, hath her eye its lightnings flash'd, to scath
The bloom young Pleasure sheds on Glory's path;
Her ear, indignant as she march'd along,
Scorn'd every charm of soft lascivious song?
Say, hath she view'd, if pass'd the mourner by,
The drooping form, nor heav'd one female sigh;
Arm'd with proud intellect, at fortune laugh'd, †
Mock'd the vain threat, and brav'd the envenom'd shaft?
Say, hath your chief the ideal depths explor'd, ‡
Amid the flaming tracts of spirit soar'd,

so. The people shouted: "No more altars; no more priests—no God, but the God of nature." See Robison, p. 252.

† Miss Wollstonecraft "possessed a firmness of mind, an unconquerable greatness of soul; by which, after a short internal struggle, she was accustomed to rise above difficulties and sufferings."
Godwin's Memoirs, p. 38.

‡ Flammantia mœnia mundi.—I here allude, also, to the spiritus intus alit, and the mens agitat molem of the Platonists: for I conceive,

And from base earth, by Reason's vigor borne,
Hail'd the fair beams of Mind's expanding morn?
Alas! in every aspiration bold,
I saw the creature of a mortal mould:
Yes! not untrembling (tho' I half ador'd
A mind by Genius fraught, by Science stor'd)
I saw the Heroine mount the dazzling dome
Where Shakspeare's spirit kindled, to illume
His favourite FUSELI, and with magic might
To earthly sense unlock'd a world of light!
Full soon, amid the high pictorial blaze,
I saw a Sibyl-transport in her gaze:
To the great Artist, from his wondrous Art,
I saw transferr'd the whole enraptur'd Heart;
Till, mingling soul with soul, in airy trance,
Enlighten'd and inspir'd at every glance,

Philosophism has reduced the God of the Universe, to this pervading mind or spirit,

And from the dross of appetite refin'd, *
And, grasping at angelic food, all mind,
Down from the empyreal heights she sunk, betray'd
To poor Philosophy---a love-sick maid! †
-----But hark! lascivious murmurs melt around;
And pleasure trembles in each dying sound.
A myrtle bower, in fairest bloom array'd,
To laughing Venus streams the silver shade:
Thrill'd with fine ardors *Collinsonias* glow, ‡
And, bending, breathe their loose desires below.

* "However gross, indeed, the food might be,
" . . . . . .to taste
" Think not, she would be nice.". . . . . .
" . . . . . .for what redounds, transpires
" Thro' spirits with ease!" Paradise Lost, b. 5. l. 432.

† "Miss Wollstonecraft used often to meet Mr. Fuseli at the house
" of a common friend, where she was so charmed with his talents, and
" the tout ensemble, that she suffered herself to fall in love with him,
" though a married man." See Godwin's Memoirs.

‡ "The vegetable passion of love is agreeably seen in the flower
" of the Parnassia, in which the males alternately approach and recede

Each gentle air a swelling anther heaves,
Wafts its full sweets, and shivers thro' the leaves.
Bath'd in new bliss, the Fair-one greets the bower,
And ravishes a flame from every flower;
Low at her feet inhales the master's sighs,
And darts voluptuous poison from her eyes.
Yet, while each heart-pulse, in the Paphian grove,
Beats quick to IMLAY and licentious love, *

"from the female, and in the flower of Nigella, or Devil in the Bush, "in which the tall females bend down to their dwarf husbands. But "I was, this morning, surprised to observe, among Sir Brooke "Boothby's valuable collection of plants at Asbourn, the manifest "adultery of several females of the plant Collinsonia, who had bent "themselves into contact with the males of other flowers of the same "plant, in their vicinity, neglectful of their own."

Botanic Garden, Part the First, p. 197---3d. Edit.

* To smother in dissipation her passion for Fuseli, Miss W. had fled to France. There she met with a paramour responsive to her sighs, a Mr. Imlay: with him she formed a connexion, though not a matrimonial one; being always of opinion, with Eloisa, that

A sudden gloom the gathering tempest spreads;
The floral arch-work withers o'er their heads;
Whirlwinds the paramours asunder tear;
And wisdom falls, the victim of despair. *

And dost thou rove, with no internal light, †
Poor maniac! thro' the stormy waste of night?

"Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,
"Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies!"

* Imlay soon left his lady to her "own imaginations." Thus abandoned, she returned to London; and driven to desperation, attempted to put an end to her life, but was recovered. She soon, however, made a second effort to plunge into eternity. In a dark and tempestuous night, she repaired to Putney-bridge; where, determined to throw herself into the river, she walked up and down, for half an hour, through the rain, that her clothes, being thoroughly drenched and heavy, might facilitate her descent into the water. She then leaped from the top of the bridge; but finding still a difficulty in sinking, tried to press her clothes closely around her, and at last became insensible; but at this moment she was discovered, and brought back to life. See Godwin's Memoirs.

† "I do not think my sister so to seek,
"Or so unprincipled in Virtue's book,
"And the sweet peace that Goodness bosoms ever,

Hast thou no sense of guilt to be forgiv'n,
No comforter on earth, no hope in Heaven?
Stay, stay---thine impious arrogance restrain---
What tho' the flood may quench thy burning brain,
Rash woman! can its whelming wave bestow
Oblivion, to blot out eternal woe?

" O come (a voice seraphic seems to say)
" Fly that pale form---come sisters! come away.
" Come, from those livid limbs withdraw your gaze,
" Those limbs which Virtue views in mute amaze;
" Nor deem, that Genius lends a veil, to hide
" The dire apostate, the fell suicide. *-----

" As that the single want of light and noise
" Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts."
See Milton's Comus, l. 370, &c. &c.

* I know nothing of Miss Wollstonecraft's character or conduct, but from the Memoirs of Godwin, with whom this lady was afterwards connected. "We did not marry," says, Godwin: but during her pregnancy by G. they married. She died in consequence of child-birth, in 1797. A woman who has broken through all religious

" Come, join, with wonted smiles, a kindred train,
" Who court, like you, the Muse; nor court in vain.

restraints, will commonly be found ripe for every species of licentiousness. Miss W. had been bred to the established Church; but from her intimacy with the late Dr. Price, was induced, occasionally, to attend the sectarian worship. Thus "halting between two opinions," she at length regarded both, as the mere prejudices of education, and became equally averse from the church and the conventicle. And, accordingly, for the last ten years of her life, she frequented no place of public worship at all. How far a woman of such principles, was qualified to superintend the education of young ladies, is a point which I shall leave, to be discussed and determined by the circles of fashion and gallantry—intimating only, that Miss W. was a governess of the daughter of Lord Viscount Kingsborough.—Her meditated suicide, we shall contemplate with fresh horror, when we consider that, at the time of the desperate act, she was a mother, deserting a poor helpless offspring. But, burst the ties of religion; and the bands of nature will snap asunder! Sentiments of religion may, doubtless, exist in the heart, without the external profession of it: but, that this woman was neither a Christian, nor a Mahometan, nor even a Deist, is sufficiently evident from the triumphant report of Godwin. Godwin, then her husband, boasts that during her last illness (which continued ten days) not a word of a religious tendency dropped from her lips.—I cannot but think, that the Hand of Providence is visible, in her life, her death, and in the Memoirs themselves. As she was given up to her "heart's lusts," and let "to follow her own imaginations," that the fallacy of her doctrines

" Mark, where the sex have oft, in ancient days,*
" To modest Virtue, claim'd a nation's praise ;

and the effects of an irreligious conduct, might be manifested to the world ; and as she died a death that strongly marked the distinction of the sexes, by pointing out the destiny of women, and the diseases to which they are liable ; so her husband was permitted, in writing her Memoirs, to labour under a temporary infatuation, that every incident might be seen without a gloss—every fact exposed without an apology.

* I need not remind my readers of Lucretia, Portia, Arria, Zenobia ; or attempt to display the virtues of Cornelia, Aurelia or Attia, whose attention to the education of their children is particularly noticed by the author of that beautiful Dialogue on the Decline of Eloquence. Quintilian, indeed, tells us, that in the age immediately preceding his own, ladies of rank were accustomed to superintend the moral education both of their sons and daughters. That the ancients entertained notions of female delicacy not very dissimilar from our own, may be inferred from the sentiments of Pericles, who " advises the " Athenian women to aspire only to those virtues that are peculiar to " their sex, and to follow their natural modesty ;" from Seneca's high opinion of the talents and virtues of women, and even from the imaginary portraits of a Panthea, a Penelope, an Andromache, a Livinia---though the last personage, indeed, is generally regarded, as no favorite of the poet. To digress a moment from the main subject, I would observe, that Virgil has given us, in a line which has been little understood, a delicate picture of Lavinia :

Causa mali tanti, atque oculos dejecta decoros.

" Chas'd from the public scene the fiend of strife,
" And shed a radiance o'er luxurious life;
" In silken fetters bound the obedient throng,
" And soften'd despots by the power of song.
" Yet woman owns a more extensive sway
" Where Heaven's own graces pour the living ray:

Lavinia is here painted, as casting her lovely eyes to the ground, from the consciousness of her being the cause of so great a calamity, but still preserving the serenity of her mind, from the consciousness that she is but the innocent cause of it. They are beautiful eyes from the pensiveness of thought, and the complacency of innocenee; they are beautiful, from the characteristic propriety of their expression. The English reader can conceive no notion of the portrait, from the following versions of that inimitable verse:

" . . . . . at her side,
" With downcast eyes appears the fatal bride."

Dryden, b. xi. v, 723.

" Lavinia grac'd her side, the royal fair,
" The guiltless cause of this destructive war:
" To earth her streaming eyes the maid inclin'd."

Pitt, v. 674.

" And vast its influence o'er the social ties,
" By Heaven inform'd, if female genius rise *---
" Its power how vast, in critic wisdom sage,
" If MONTAGUE † refine a letter'd age;
" And CARTER, ‡ with a milder air, diffuse
" The moral precepts of the Grecian Muse;
" And listening girls perceive a charm unknown
" In grave advice, as utter'd by CHAPONE; ||

* After all, it is Christianity, which has given women their appropriate rank in society. See Robison's Proofs, &c. pp. 262---271. See also, p. 457.

† It is no trivial praise to say, that Mrs. Montague is the best female critic, ever produced in any country. Mad. Dacier, compared with Mrs. M. is all affectation.

‡ Though I have alluded to Carter's Epictetus, yet I prefer her poetry to her translation. Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Barbauld closely resemble each other, in their style of poetry. There is a calm equability in their numbers. Their diction is perspicuous and pure. But Mrs. B. is more correct. Nor is Mrs. Carter equal to her poetic sister, in descriptive powers. Warrington Academy is finely coloured: we meet with no such painting in Mrs. Carter. They both wrote Odes: but I

" If SEWARD * sting with rapture every vein,
" Or gay PIOZZI † sport in lighter strain;

cannot say much for their lyric talents. The Ode to Melancholy and the Ode to Content, written in the same agreeable stanza, flowing with the same melodious sweetness, breathing the same placid air, may both be admitted as specimens of a lively fancy; though they have little of the vivida vis animi.

‖ Chapone's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, are incontestible proofs of her ingenuity, and the goodness of her heart. But Mrs. C. lately made an effort on the harp; an instrument, which (she ought to have considered) requires gracefulness and ease. She was deficient in both: and her notes were weak and harsh. I was sorry to see so excellent an instructor of youth, expose herself by an affectation of things beyond her reach. But I was more concerned to see her sanctioned by the example of Fordyce.

* " Poetry (says an excellent writer) is passion." Miss Seward's Poems are " thoughts that breathe, and words that burn." And he, who hesitates to allow this lady the very first place among the female Poets of this country, must be grossly deficient in taste. Her " Cooke," her " Andre," her " Louisa," are, all, first-rate performances: either of these enchanting Poems would be sufficient to immortalise the name of Seward.

" If BURNEY * mix with sparkling humour chaste
" Delicious feelings and the purest taste,
" Or RADCLIFFE † wrap in necromantic gloom
" The impervious forest and the mystic dome;
" If BEAUCLERK ‡ paint Lenora's spectre-horse,
" The uplifted lance of death, the grisly corse;
" And e'en a Princess lend poetic grace §
" The pencil's charm, and breathe in every trace."

† Mrs. Piozzi is distinguished by a lively imagination. Both in her Verse and Prose, we have numerous felicities of thought and expression.

* The united merits of Evelina, Cecilia and Camilla, must place Mrs. D'Arblay, above all the Novel-writers that have existed, since the first invention of this delightful species of composition.

† Her Muse (as Gray, after a Greek writer, said of Ossian's) is "the very demon of poetry." In her Mysteries of Udolpho, we have all that is wild, magnificent and beautiful, combined by the genius of Shakspeare, and the taste of Mason.

She ceas'd ;* and round their MORE † the sisters
sigh'd !
Soft on each tongue repentant murmurs died ;

‡ The Tale of Leonora, has been finely illustrated by the pencil of lady Diana Beauclerk.

* The designs with which the princess Elizabeth furnished Sir James Bland Burgess, for "the Birth and Triumph of Love," are exquisitely beautiful. The princess Elizabeth, indeed, is eminently accomplished, as well as her Royal Sisters. Nor is it the voice of flattery which says, that the elegance of their persons, heightened by all the lustre of the fashionable acquirements, must yield to those mental graces which they could only have attained from a virtuous education. For such they are indebted to a mother who is thoroughly skilled in the cultivation of the heart; and whose high example must surely have a benignant influence on the British ladies; unless the example of the great hath ceased to attract imitation.

* The Margravine of Anspach, Lady Burrell, Mrs. Dobson, and many other ladies of high literary attainments, here occur—though to notice every distinguished name, would not accord with my design.

† Miss Hannah More may justly be esteemed, as a character, in all points, diametrically opposite to Miss Wollstonecraft; excepting,

And sweetly scatter'd (as they glanc'd away)
Their conscious "blushes spoke a brighter day."

indeed, her genius and literary attainments. To the great natural endowments of Miss W. Miss More has added the learning of lady Jane Grey without the pedantry, and the Christian graces of Mrs. Rowe, without the enthusiasm. Her "Percy," her "Sacred Dramas," her "Essays," and her "Thoughts on the Manners of the "Great" will be read, as long as sensibility and good taste shall exist among us. From her Essays, I shall make an extract or two, which will throw light on the subject before us. Talking of the distinction of the sexes, "Women," says Miss More, "have generally "quicker perceptions; men have juster sentiments. Women con- "sider how things may be prettily said; men, how they may be pro- "perly said. Women speak, to shine or please; men, to convince, "or confute. Women admire what is brilliant; men, what is solid. "Women prefer a sparkling effusion of fancy, to the most laborious "investigation of facts. In literary composition, women are pleased "with antithesis; men, with observation and a just deduction of effects "from their causes.—In Romance and Novel-writing, the women can- "not be excelled. To amuse, rather than to instruct, or to instruct "indirectly, by short inferences drawn from a long concatenation of "circumstances, is at once, the business of this sort of composition, and "one of the characteristics of female genius. In short, it appears, that the mind, in each sex, has some natural kind of bias, which constitutes

" a distinction of character; and that the happiness of both depends, in " a great measure, on the preservation and observance of this distinc- " tion." " Essay," pp. 9———13.

I may add, that we have upon record, many literary female characters in ancient Greece and Rome, in Spain, in France, modern Italy, Germany, and England. But we meet with one or two philosophers only, among them all, and those of an amphibious nature—such, for instance, as Laura Cereti, who taught philosophy at Brescia, at the age of eighteen. In this country, there are few ladies who have written history with a Macaulay, or composed treatises on astronomy, with a Bryan. I might point out numerous femalities, indeed, in Mrs. Macaulay's history; and in the " Compendious System of Astronomy," I am rather pleased with elegant illustration, than instructed by science.

* That Mrs. Godwin herself, may be numbered among the penitent, and he, also, who " drew her frailties from their dread abode," is the sincere and fervent wish of a heart in charity with all men."

THE END.

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